

NEW ENGLAND NOTE

NOTES ON THE RHODE ISLAND FLORA

RICHARD L. CHAMPLIN

The following list includes plant species found and collected by the author over a period of years, proving that even in the smallest state one can turn up species new to the area or otherwise of interest botanically. Specimens of all species have been sent to the Herbarium of the New England Botanical Club.

*Thelypteris palustris* (Salisb.) Schott var. *pubescens* (Laws.) Fern.

A far cry from their usual habitat, specimens of the Marsh Fern grow in Newport, RI. not in an open, sunny marsh, but next to the mortar cementing together the granite stonewall of a private estate. About three feet above the sidewalk they share the extraordinary habitat with *Woodsia obtusa* and *Asplenium platyneuron*. In five years of observation I have failed to find these Marsh Ferns fruiting, but the sterile fronds have all the diagnostic traits of the species—forking veins, the frequent twist of the whole frond, smooth green axis, black rootstock, etc.

*Dryopteris filix-mas* (L.) Schott

When Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) designed the landscape in Newport for John W. Auchincloss in 1887 at the estate known as Hammersmith Farm, he included a rock garden for alpine plants. It consisted of a long trench blasted out of calcium-bearing shale. A bed of the *Dryopteris* was planted along the north ridge. Not only has the fern survived, it has flourished, and its spores have developed new plants in various parts of Newport, three of which have been located so far. Male fern, a mountain dweller, has come down to altitudes of less than one hundred feet.

*Panicum amarum* Ell.

M. L. Fernald's 8th Edition of Gray's *Manual of Botany*, 1950, puts Connecticut as the northernmost range of this grass. But it has reached Rhode Island and was found along Narragansett Bay at Plum Point, Saunderstown (Washington County) in 1989. It grows on the beach with *Prunus maritima*, and occasional Geasters.

*Carex kobomugi* Ohwi

This exotic carex occurs on Rhode Island sand dunes at East Beach, Charlestown (Washington County), found and collected in 1981.

*Epipactis helleborine* (L.) Crantz

This orchid has found a congenial habitat along a busy street in the City of Newport. One of its several locations is under the spread of another European species, the European Hornbeam, *Carpinus betulus*.

*Epifagus virginiana* (L.) Bart.

An even more striking example of adaptability than the above is the case of the Beech Drops. This saprophyte grows in eastern North America under the American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). In Newport, however, it has become established under a specimen of European Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) on an estate where many European Beeches have come to maturity, but no American Beeches. The nearest known occurrence of Beech Drops and American Beech is about twelve miles away. The *Epifagus* is not known to grow natively in Europe, which makes this choice of habitat all the more surprising.

*Morus rubra* L.

Rhode Island does not fall within the natural distribution range of the Red Mulberry. Yet in Foster (Providence County) on the outskirts of the Lester Steere apple orchard grow without cultivation five specimens of the fruit-bearing tree. The probable explanation? This land in the nineteenth century was a cherry orchard. In that age, amid their cherries, orchardists planted Red Mulberries, which ripen simultaneously with the cherries. Thus they hoped to draw the bird population away from the cherries to the less valuable fruit. These specimens have apparently escaped to the surrounding, rich woods where they grow in company with Christmas fern, Basswood, Butternuts, and white Baneberry.

PRISCILLA ROAD

JAMESTOWN, RHODE ISLAND 02835